

# RES ANTIQUITATIS

JOURNAL OF ANCIENT HISTORY

VOLUME 3

Centro de História de Além-Mar

## CHAM



Universidade Nova de Lisboa  
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas  
Universidade dos Açores

# The trace of Osiris: The Egyptian Myth in the Spanish Monarchy of Philip II

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It has been more than half of a century since Karl H. Dannenfeldt refuted the concept of the Renaissance establishing the origin of the *true* civilization in Greece and its culmination in Rome, totally ignoring any sort of Pre-Classical contribution<sup>1</sup>. Even though the prominence of the Renaissance focused on the Greco-Roman legacy, during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the ancient oriental civilizations were not despised at all. In the European Renaissance circles, it was well-known that part of the Western references had to be searched in cultures that preceded the Hellenic one and, in particular, in the thousand-year-old Egypt. This research was not exclusively distinctive of the Renaissance. Greco-Latin authors such as Herodotus, Plato, Plutarch or Diodorus Siculus had already recognized the Egyptian supremacy in terms of religion, philosophy, science and architecture. Subsequently, the recognition of the Egyptian supremacy was also accepted by erudites of the Middle Ages, under the influence of Augustine of Hippo and in spite of the prejudices motivated by the biblical tradition. This supremacy was mainly preserved in the bosom of Christianity's thinking due to the fact that apart from the medieval concept *translatio imperii*, another parallel notion hinged on it: the *translatio cultus et philosophiae*. This last theory aimed to establish the linear

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<sup>1</sup> Dannenfeldt 1952.

transmission of the “knowledge” originated in Egypt to Greeks, and then to Romans, to finally lay on Gauls and Spaniards<sup>2</sup>.

The cultural and philosophical Egyptian *translatio* gained relevance in the last third of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, the Neoplatonic tradition was reintroduced and the interest in Hermetic and occultist issues increased. Thanks to Marsilio Ficino and his Latin translation of *Corpus Hermeticum* (Treviso, 1471), the diffusion of the Hermetic doctrine and the publication of Neoplatonic works focused on Egypt made part of a complex philosophic framework which embraced the figures of the mythical Egyptian King-philosopher named Hermes Trismegistus and the Persian Zoroaster. The project of Ficino entitled *prisca theologia* was in line with an attempt to develop a «natural and universal» religion reconciled with Christianity. It included a specific field to Renaissance studies encoded in a different – and, in the same breath, complementary – level of this philosophic framework: the one related to Egyptian hieroglyphs. This field was promoted due to the discovery, in 1419, of a Greek manuscript dated back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and known as *Hieroglyphica*, whose authorship was ascribed to the alexandrine priest Horapollo Niloo<sup>3</sup>. The existence of a supposed Egyptian tradition of lore, in which “knowledge” lied in a latent way, offered an appealing prospect in the middle of the Renaissance. This possibility had enabled Egyptian priests to abridge their wisdom and summarize their ancestral magic through hieroglyphs. Therefore, in case of interpreting them, the maximum degree of “knowledge” would be achieved, the Egyptian *translatio* would be verified and the state-

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<sup>2</sup> This is what authors such as the German Otto of Freising in his masterpiece *Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus* assured in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Dannenfeldt 1952, 436.

<sup>3</sup> The manuscript, being its headline *Horapóllonos Neilóus Ieroglyphiká*, compiles and describes a collection of 189 presumptive Egyptian hieroglyphs. The document was taken to Florence and the Medicea Laurenziana Library still preserves it. When it was elaborated, it had been a long time since the Egyptian hieroglyphic script had fallen into disuse: the last known datable inscription dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This gap (that was overcome when the hieroglyphs were uncoded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) does not affect the successful emanation of Horapollo’s treatise everywhere in Europe since the *princeps* aldina (Venice, 1505), and the Latin translation by Bernardino Trebazio (Augsburg, 1515), both followed by multiple editions between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, the Horapollonian treatise became the canonical oeuvre that consolidates the Hermetic and symbolic literature of the early modern Europe.

ment that *Trismegistus* proclaimed in his *Corpus Hermeticum* asserting that the History of the West was indissolubly bound to Egypt would be assented<sup>4</sup>.

In line with Dannenfeldt and together with the vindication of *all Egyptian* advocated between 1950s and 1970s in diverse studies with an historiographic approach on the Renaissance (Erik Iversen, Frances A. Yates, Jurgis Baltrusaitis) and until the contribution of Brian Curran in his brilliant outline *Egyptian Renaissance* in Italy during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento<sup>5</sup>, the *trace* of the ancient Egypt in the Hispanic context during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century must neither be ignored, nor considered superfluous or anecdotal. Nevertheless, and as it happened in the Italian case, the reception of the Egyptian myth in the Spanish Monarchy resulted in the perception of a completely transformed Egypt with regard to its primeval canons. It was disseminated by the Greco-Latin sources; corrupted by the Biblical, Jewish and Christian traditions; undermined by the Renaissance ideas; and interfered with unshakable Hermetic connotations. An Egypt whose myth was discerned in the intellectual sphere and materialized in the architectural field, whether by means of the layout of certain *egyptianizing* elements and Egypt-inspired forms (pyramids, obelisks), or by the inclusion of *pseudo-Egyptian* hieroglyphs that perfectly fitted in the symbolic and allegorical culture of the Renaissance so in need of iconographic references to enrich its diverse mediums of iconographic expression. Hieroglyphs stemmed not only from the original Horapollo's treatise, but also from another essential contemporary compilation elaborated in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century by the Italian humanist Pierio Valeriano, who best captured Horapollo's heritage in *Hieroglyphica Sive de Sacris Aegyptiorum* (Basilea and

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<sup>4</sup> The *Corpus Hermeticum* compiles a collection of texts dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. These are from different nature (Gnostic, Alchemic), diverse origin (Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, Persian) and its subject focuses on Hermes Trismegistus (the «Thrice Great»). His origins date back to Thoth, the Egyptian deity of Writing and Science. This association resulted in the figure of Hermes-Thoth, who, according to these texts, governed 3.226 years and wrote 36.525 books compiling the Egyptian philosophy and magic. Naydler 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Curran 2007.

Florence, 1556). An Egypt that, in some way, did not renounce to that supremacy over the remaining *provincias del mundo* inasmuch, as according to what a Spanish author wrote in a Philip II's exequies,

«...entre las que más florecieron en potestad, riqueza y grandeza, la primera y la que tuvo la prima en todo fue el Reyno de Egipto. Y como el león tiene el primado entre todos los animales de la tierra, assi Egipto lo tuvo entre todas las Provincias del mundo»<sup>6</sup>.

In order to know how the Egyptian myth was articulated in the Catholic Monarchy of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the commonly designated *trace of Osiris* has been trailed. A *trace* – symbolic in one sense, literal in another one – that enables the establishment of the extent that this mark had on Spanish soil. This influence can be noticed in quite assorted fields and through multiple outlines: mythical genealogies, historiography of that moment, studies on hieroglyphs and royal events regarding the Crown. Hence, a *trace* that reached the circles of power, where Egypt could act and legitimise the Habsburg dynasty, turn into an effective propaganda means and facilitate part of the wheels that should support the complex Hispanic machinery of the House of Austria.

Nonetheless, Egypt was not always the transmitter of “knowledge” and wisdom. Its versatile perception could derive in the complete contrary and turn into a not less efficient instrument aiming to weaken the wheels and destabilise the machinery. This circumstance explains the fact that the first *trace* is framed up around Philip II considering him as the *new pharaoh*. This image of Philip II was begotten in the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it was understood from the perspective of the Netherlands transmuted into a *second Israel* and the Stadtholder, William of Orange, into a *new Moses*, whose mission was to defend his people from the Spanish pharaonic tyranny. The image of Philip as the pharaoh of the *Exodus* was gathered by the early 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> «Among the ones that thrived the most in authority, wealth and *grandeur*, the first one in everything was the Reign of Egypt. And, as the lion is considered to be beyond every animal on Earth, so was Egypt considered to be beyond all the Provinces of the World as well». Almela 1600, Lib. II, 91.

century Dutch literature, although it revisited previous references which considered the duke of Alba in similar terms<sup>7</sup>. This is not the only time that a territory intended to place itself as a *new Israel*, yet it was the first to establish two diametrically opposed perceptions of Egypt. These impressions would keep on combining themselves in the early modern period: the tyrannical and execrable Egypt in contrast to the magnificent and desirable Egypt.

According to the second impression and still in the Netherlands, but in the previous context of the *felicissimo viaje* covered by – at that time – Prince Philip between 1548 and 1551, the Flemish finalized the preparations in order to receive the regal retinue in their respective towns. Two triumphant entries described by Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella in his chronicle narrating the journey of the future monarch (published in Antwerp, 1552) refers to the *egyptianizing* elements and Egypt-inspired forms previously mentioned (pyramids and obelisks). On the one hand, a small pyramid built in the locality of Dendermonde (July 12<sup>th</sup> 1549), which made its inhabitants yearn for the place to turn into no less than the *new Memphis* upon the arrival of «tan benigno príncipe»<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the four obelisks framing a shrine dedicated to Roman god Janus and located in the avenue leading to the Spanish Arch presiding his reception in Antwerp (September 11<sup>th</sup> 1549). These obelisks that completed the solar-related royal worship, since the Egyptians «dedicáronlos a sus dioses y principalmente al Sol, cuyos rayos ymitavan en la forma d'ellos», just as Calvete precisely described<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The figure of Philip II as a *new pharaoh* was mentioned by Joost van der Vondel in the Biblical tragedy *Het Pascha, ofte De Verlossing der kind'ren ren Israëls uyt Egypten* (Amsterdam, 1612). In reference to the Duke of Alba, his arrival in Brussels in 1567 and the establishment of the Council of Troubles (Council of Blood) caused, the very next year, the appearance of some satirical verses where Alba was presented as pharaoh. Notwithstanding, this was not the only assimilation regarding the Duke. He was also presented as Herod or as Queen Jezebel to make him look ridiculous: «With your teeth dripping with blood / Like Pharaoh and Jezebel, / You come to these Netherlands / As Herod, angry and fierce: / To hang, murder and burn, / To decapitate all with haste, / So you will be disgraced with Babylon / For all the innocent blood». Kunzle 2002, 136.

<sup>8</sup> It means «such a benign prince» and it refers to young Philip.

<sup>9</sup> «Dedicated them to their Gods and, mainly, to the Sun, whose beams of light reproduced their shape». Calvete de Estrella 2001, Lib. IV, 387.

The presence of these Egyptian-looking and Egypt-inspired forms, as well as the arguments that justify this fact is not trivial. The reception of the Egyptian myth in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century takes place in a key moment, when art was absolutely committed to its political function. The ornamentation, the beautification, the ceremoniality and the propaganda message of royal events drove this art to search symbolic and allegorical references in ancient times. However, among Classical compositions, Latin and Biblical references, emblems of Alciato, illustrated epitaphs and headwords, the architectural-decorative projects could include Egyptian character references, not only pyramids and obelisks, but also humanist conception hieroglyphs. In the Hispanic context from the 1550s, the extended use of the treatises of Horapollo and Pierio Valeriano suggest the existence of a specific *Hieroglyphic Renaissance* to the Spanish case, despite the nuances with the «Hieroglyphic Renaissance» detected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Karl Giehlow in the frame of Maximilian I's Holy Roman Empire and that Erik Iversen subsequently located in the Italy of the Cinquecento<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time that exploded the revolt of the Netherlands (1568), the year that was Felipe II's *annus horribilis* it marked the beginning of the Rey Prudente retired of the public, festival and ceremonial life of the Court, and avoiding whenever it was him possible «la participación personal en los rituales madrileños y, en general, de cualquier otra ciudad»<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, the amount of unavoidable positive and negative events that took place until the end of his reign is a good sign of the reception of the Egyptian myth. Proof of this are the plentiful urban ceremonies officiated in the Castilian towns with some social status and standing, whether held due to triumphant entries, exequies and funeral rites. The urban chronicles created around these events and their highly renowned authors (Juan de Mal Lara, Juan López de Hoyos or Juan Alonso de Almela, among others) reflect a

<sup>10</sup> Giehlow 1915; Iversen 1958 and 1961.

<sup>11</sup> It means «taking part in rituals in Madrid and, in general, any other city». Río Barredo 2000, 56.

vivid perception of Egypt in Spain during the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In their iconographic programmes, these humanists appealed to Horapollo and Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* as an iconic and literary source. This was due to hieroglyphs transmitting the «misterios antiguos egipcios» as the Sevillian humanist Mal Lara observed in the frame of Philip II's 1570 reception in Seville<sup>12</sup>. Subsequently, the «letras hiereoglificas» ("hieroglyphic characters") enabled the composition of encoded propaganda messages with an hermetic sense, which should be part of the commemorative exercise of the Catholic Monarchy and satisfy the iconic purpose of condensing and expressing that

«...las mayores virtudes que tiene un Rey y con que se sustenta, que eran Fundacion, Nobleza, Riqueza, Fertilidad, Obediencia, Victoria, Clemencia, Alegria, Religion, Valor, Sanctidad, Iusticia, Prudencia y Fee, lo qual todo podra ver Vuestra Señoría sembrado assi en lo pintado, como en lo escripto»<sup>13</sup>.

The *Hieroglyphic Renaissance* did not just limit itself to humanistic iconic programmes planned for its royal events, but it was also present in different kind of contexts. A brief review allows observing this interest, for example, in the first documentary inventories of the Escorial Monastery Library. A noteworthy amount of works included in the 1576 books' delivery are closely related to Egypt. Among these works, Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* (*editio princeps*, 1556) together with Horapollo's treatise, gathered in a copy of the Greek manuscript and in at least two printed editions, stand out. Notwithstanding, none of them corresponds to the only version of Horapollo, *Oroy Apollonos Nielooy Ierogluphica*, published in Spain (Valencia, 1556). This Valentian edition reveals the responsible's dedication to this subject,

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<sup>12</sup> Mal Lara refers to the «ancient Egyptian mysteries».

<sup>13</sup> «The greatest virtues that a King has and which support him, that were Foundation, Nobility, Wealth, Fertility, Obedience, Victory, Clemency, Joy, Religion, Courage, Sanctity, Justice, Prudence and Faith, will Your Majesty be able to see it expressed both in the paintings and in the writings». Mal Lara, reprint 1992, 58.



the Aragonese humanist Juan Lorenzo Palmireno, whose emblematic and hieroglyphic contribution beyond the Horapollonian treatise<sup>14</sup>. Despite that, Horapollo was known in Spain before the Palmireno edition. Around 1550, authors such as Sebastián Fox Morcillo or Pero Mexía had already referred to the «libro particular Oroapolo, donde el que fuere curioso hallará muchas cosas apacibles y provechosas»<sup>15</sup>.

The same 1576 Escorial's inventory included the interesting codex known as *Os desenhos das antighualhas*, a collection of a hundred of drawings and designs alluding Roman antiques elaborated by the Portuguese Francisco de Hollanda in the decade of 1540. Certain engravings included hieroglyphic inscriptions encrypted in Egyptian monuments that were taken to Rome in the time of Augustus. From an epistolary point of view, these were surprisingly credible hieroglyphs which, indeed, evidenced the fact that Egyptian models could sometimes be comparable to the Classic ones. This may be the reason why the Escorial's batch, together with the array gathered by the royal architect Juan de Herrera, combined a concern for *all Egyptian* with a series of Hermetic, magic and occultist knowledge which, far from what was categorised as orthodox, obliged to allow for a specific classification in order to cover works such as Diodorus Siculus' *De fabulosis Aegyptorum Gestis*; Iamblichus Chalcidensis' *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*; Plutarch of Chareonea's *Moralia* (Venetian version of 1509 which compiled the XXVIII treatise entitled *De Iside et Osiride*); Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphilii*; or the Hermetic texts compiled by Ficino<sup>16</sup>. In addition, the representation of a line of thinking (referring to Geometry, on the west wall of the room)

<sup>14</sup> His comment on Pablo Giovio's *Diverse Imprese* (Lyon, 1551) dates from 1555; it is the Italian version of Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum Liber*. In 1576, Palmireno created the *Alphabetum Rerum Heroicarum i quo sunt Emblemata et Ieroglyphica* (...).

<sup>15</sup> «Particular Oroapolo's book, where the one who were curious, shall find plenty of pleasant and useful things». Mexía 2003, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Andrés 1964. For the division of the Escorial Library performed by the first official librarian, Benito Arias Montano, in the areas of Astrology, Fortune-telling, Alchemy, Hermetics and Ars Memorativa, refer to Taylor 2000. This work of Taylor was originally published in 1967 in a short English version in a collective work: *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London: Phaidon Press, vol. I: 81-109.

could probably justify that «The Egyptian priests», one of the fresco paintings in keeping with Liberal Arts, hangs on the walls of the Escorial Monastery Library. It portrays these men standing next to the Nile and checking the arable lands after the flooding caused by the river<sup>17</sup>.

Aside from its usage as a propagandistic instrument, may it be favourable or not, ancient Egypt ascertained the dynastic legitimacy of the Habsburg. For this reason, the next *trace* comes from Osirian origin mythical genealogies derived – yet just in part – from the mythical patterns drawn by the Italian humanist Giovanni Nanni, better known as Annio da Viterbo, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. His controversial *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (Venice and Rome, 1498) motivated the origin of the Italian Osiris and, in the long run, the origin of the Spanish Osiris as well. One of the most significant genealogical documents in reference to this is *Genealogia illustrissime Domus Austriae*, a scroll that dates back to April 1536<sup>18</sup>. It is a beautiful illuminated genealogy, offered as present to Charles V during his visit to Rome that very same year and afterwards handed to an extremely young Philip, who decided to custody the document in his personal batch during almost all of his life and did not include it in the Escorial Library until a quite late date<sup>19</sup>.

Through a distinctive Renaissance mix of Biblical and pagan nature characters, the *Genealogia illustrissime* attributed mythical Osirian origins to both Charles V and to his firstborn. Post-Flood origins of the future Philip II (who was only ten years old at the moment when *Genealogia illustrissime* was elaborated), dated back to two dual-nature figures: the first one is Noah-Janus, a fusion between the mankind restorer and the Roman peacemaker deity; the second one is Cam-Zoroaster, this is, the union of the Patriarch's *cursed son*

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<sup>17</sup> For this subject, see Taylor 2000 and Mulcahy 1992, especially pp. 98-99.

<sup>18</sup> *Genealogia illustrissime Domus Austriae que per lineam rectam masculinam ab ipso Noah humani generis reparatore vsque ad Carolum Quintum Caesarem Philippi Castellae Regis filium deducitur et derivatur ex verissimis Authoribus et monumentis foundationibus et institutionibus... decepta 1536 mense Aprili*. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Res. 265.

<sup>19</sup> It has been possible to specify that the *Genealogia illustrissime* was included in the Escorial's collection in 1593. Refer to Checa Cremades 1989. See also Sánchez-Molero 1998a and 1998b.

with Zoroaster, the Mesopotamian inventor of Magic (with certain Hermetic connotations). After these two figures, the genealogical line continues with the Egyptian king Osiris whose descendent is Hercules *the Egyptian*, a specific Hercules type and different from the traditional Greek Heracles, who, as we will see, will have an important role in the mythical Spanish context. In *Genealogia illustrissime* merged, then, a syncretic mythology based on myths previous to Greek culture and religion over which Egypt had a great influence. This circumstance conditioned the assimilation of Hercules, the Classical hero and semi-god par excellence into the Egyptian God Heru-Ur<sup>20</sup>. Thus, *the Egyptian* Hercules became the son of Osiris and, together with his father, the co-star of the paramount myth in Egyptian religion. For that reason, it is a syncretism that, as will be exposed below, shaped Egypt as a source of virtues and connected it with Mesopotamian and other Greco-Roman-nature myths, not to forget the immovable Biblical tradition which established a genealogical link between Osiris and his ancestry associated to Noah<sup>21</sup>.

The complex message that *Genealogia illustrissime* conveys is inherent to the imagery which arose in the form of a fabulous past previous to Hispania's Romanization mainly formed based on "false chronicles". The imagery of this fabulous past leads to a third *trace*. Its outline is delineated when it comes to the primitive Hispanic history practiced during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Spanish Monarchy was not an exceptional case on the search for its mythical past. In Robert Tate's words, it was as if the whole of Western Europe, stimulated by the humanist erudites, were simultaneously seized with yearning for revealing the secrets of their origins.<sup>22</sup> From the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *gaze* at Antiquity became indispensable. A *gaze* that

<sup>20</sup> Horus/Horo is the Greek name that survived in the early modern period sometimes as «Oron».

<sup>21</sup> This kind of combinations are neither present only in *Genealogia illustrissime*, nor is this exclusively due to the *Commentaria* of Annio da Viterbo. It came from a late medieval tradition that, in the case of the Spanish Peninsula, goes back to the Al-Andalus historiography (in which there are a considerable number of Egyptian historians), and from Castilian authors like Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada (*circa* 1170-1247) to the 'Alfonsines Chronicles' which date back to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>22</sup> Tate 1954, 1-18.

was not always easy and, for this reason, it was in great measure influenced by Annio da Viterbo. Ancient Egypt enjoyed his specific position in the bosom of a historiography based on mythical and mythological models aiming to resolute the uncertain, extensive and obscure pre-Roman period and, at the same time, a historiography that must act at the mercy of particular ideological purposes. Such ostentation cannot be dissociated from the political and territorial influence that the Spanish Crown had achieved in the previous century. Hence, thanks to Viterbo's wit, Osirian genealogical roots appear beforehand in the Borgia's lineage or even in the Catholic Monarchs' one<sup>23</sup>.

The result of this syncretic mythology was the appropriation of the legendary figure Geryon, whose formulation rests on the Greek myth<sup>24</sup>. Its fusion with the Osirian myth – known by Plutarch's Classic text in the *Moralia* – was the answer to one of these ideological purposes. The resultant Geryon/Osiris myth irradiated the idealization of the Prince and presented the virtues that a good sovereign must have; therefore, according to what a Catalan author stated halfway through 16<sup>th</sup> century, Osiris came to Spain with the aim of overthrowing Geryon's tyranny, and he did it «sens que algú lo cridàs ni cosa alguna lo mogués, sinó sols per sa natural inclinació de ajudar als qui eren opresos»<sup>25</sup>. Taking his approach as a starting point, the Geryon/Osiris' myth puts forward several interpretations. One of them refers to the doctrine of tyrannicide, of which legitimacy raised an intense debate in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Among others, one of the figures that took part in this intensive debate was Juan de Mariana in *De rege et regis institutione libri III* (Toledo, 1599). When he established the distinction between «king» and «tyrant», this Jesuit classified among the second type the *Geryones tricornepores in Hispania*,

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<sup>23</sup> To know about the Osirian origins of king Fernando of Aragon and queen Isabel of Castile, refer to Dandeleit 2001. For the same origins of the Borgia family (particularly to refer to Pope Alexander VI), see Fernández de Córdova Miralles 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Geryon is an important figure who belongs to the legendary royal list of Tartessos, one of the remotest pre-Roman people in the South of Spain.

<sup>25</sup> That is «no need to be called by anyone nor moved by thing of any nature, but only due to the natural instinct of his to help the oppressed». Viladamor 2007, 257.

previously referred by him in *Historiae de Rebus Hispaniae* (Toledo, 1592). Upon mentioning the «grandissima peregrinación» (“protracted pilgrimage”) undertaken by Osiris, «la qual pasó y ennoblecíó con sus hechos casi toda la redondez de la tierra»<sup>26</sup>, Mariana praised the Osiris’ instructive aspect which made him «en todos los lugares por donde passava enseñó la manera de plantar las viñas, y de la sementera y uso del pan: beneficio tan grande, que por esta causa le tuvieron y canonizaron [the ancient Egyptians] por dios»<sup>27</sup>; and, at the highpoint of his discourse, he exalted the Egypt king’s virtues and awarded him with a good-prince aureole:

«Últimamente llegado a España, lo que en las demas partes executara, no por particular provecho suyo, sino encendido del odio que a la tyrania tenia, y a las demasias, que fue quitar los tyranos, y restituyr la libertad a las gentes, determinó hazer lo mismo en España de la qual se dezia que se hallava reducida en una miserable servidumbre, y suffrian con ella toda suerte de afrentas y indignidades»<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, after cruel Geryon’s tyrannicide was perpetrated and despite Osiris’ efforts to redirect Geryon’s descendants on the right track, his sons and successors, the Geryons, who finally succumbed to their father’s evilness. In addition, this “conversion” of the Geryons into tyrants would be irreconcilable with the orchestration of Osiris death, who, on his way back to Egypt, was murdered by order of the

<sup>26</sup> That is «during it he walked and ennobled almost the whole roundness of the Earth». Mariana 1737, chap. VIII, «De los Geryones».

<sup>27</sup> «In all the places [Osiris] went, he taught how to plant the vineyards, to sow and to use the bread: so big benefit that for this cause [the ancient Egyptians] canonized him as a god». Mariana, *ibid.* The Jesuit’s observation is framed in the same recurrent picture of Egypt: a country that holds a privileged geography thanks to the plentiful Nile. Due to its annual floods, the river provides the country with fertile lands and good harvests. This exultant Egypt will be frequent in the literature of the Spanish Golden Age and the Nile became a *leitmotiv* in the prolific works of Lope de Vega, for example.

<sup>28</sup> «Lately he arrived in Spain, what in other places did he execute, not for his own, but due to the his hatred for tyranny, and his excesses, such as the overthrow of tyranny and the restitution of the people’s freedom, determined to follow the example in Spain, which population was said to be reduced to servitude and, therefore, suffered all kinds of affronts and indignities». Mariana, *ibid.*

Geryons. The person in charge of perpetrating the second stage of the tyrannicide was his son, Hercules *the Egyptian*, who «encendido en deseo assi de imitar la gloria de su padre, como de vengar del todo su muerte, con otra no menor empresa que tomó, ni menor conquista que su padre»<sup>29</sup>. In the same line, the myth of Geryon/Osiris should create the fabulous frame to put the traditional arrival to the Iberian Peninsula of Hercules' in context, albeit it did so during its Egyptian stage that was remotely more ancient than Greek Heracles.

Another decisive *trace* in the breeding of an Egyptian imagery *per se* derives from the reception of an outdated Egypt, when the Roman irruption is set around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. An Egypt understood as a scenario of legendary stories that carried a great passionate and tragic weight and which crux revolves around Caesar, in concrete after his return to the land of the Nile when looking for Pompeius. This last figure had attempted to take refuge in the Ptolemy pharaonic Court in vain after misfortune befall him. So, Mariana relates in his *Historiae de rebus Hispaniae* that

«...siguióse el año que se contó setecientos y seys de la fundacion de Roma, muy señalado por la victorias que Cesar en él ganó, primero en los campos de Pharsalia contra Pompeio, despues en Egypto contra el rey Ptolomeo, el qual matara alevosamente al mismo Pompeio, que confiado en la amistad que tenia con aquel rey, despues de vencido, y de perdida la famosa jornada, se avia acogido a aquel reyno y metido por su puerta.»<sup>30</sup>

Upon Pompeius escape and subsequent prosecution of Caesar, another noteworthy episode in the imagery of the late Hellenistic

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<sup>29</sup> «He had a burning desire for imitating his father's glory, as well as to take revenge for his father's death, with no fewer decisiveness, nor less conquest». Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> «The year that counted seven hundred and six from the foundation of Rome arrived, a year gloriously marked by Caesar's victories during that time, first of all in Pharsalia's battlefields against Pompeius, then, in Egypt, against the King Ptolemy, who would, with treachery, kill Pompeius himself, convinced in its turn of the friendship he had with said king, after being defeated, and having lost the famous battle took refuge in that realm and entered through its doors». Mariana, *Historia general de España*, Lib. III, pp. 472-473.

Egypt took place: the Alexandrian War in the year 48 BC. The trigger of this conflict had a woman's name. The name of a young queen, the sister and wife of child-pharaoh Ptolemy XIII, who found in Caesar the necessary support to claim, in Egypt, the rights of what she considered to be her throne: her name was Cleopatra<sup>31</sup>. In the early modern period, the reign of Cleopatra VII was seen in different ways considering her exercise as the Pharaoh of Egypt (51-30 BC). The governing was at the mercy of both her political and loving relationships, and of two of the most influential men during the First and Second Roman Triumvirates, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, although their respective perception presents considerable differences. The figure of Antony was summarized as the antithesis of one of the principles of the Spanish Monarchy: the «reputación» ("reputation"). The cause for this perception was nobody but Cleopatra: she herself was, as Pero Mexía pointed out, «fue causa de su perdición» ("the cause of her own ruination") since «el malaventurado Antonio, que toda su vida avia sido esforçado y excelente Capitan», gave himself in to the beauty and charm of the Egyptian woman and ended by «dado y asido del amor» of Cleopatra<sup>32</sup>.

These connotations do not exempt the fact that the first meeting between Antony and Cleopatra, which officially took place in the year 41 BC in Tarsus (Asia Minor), already was mitified in Antiquity thanks to Plutarch and his *Life of Antony*, circumstance that may have had an influence on authors such as Calvete de Estrella when searching analogies in his chronicles. Within this context, and after a series of

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<sup>31</sup> Cleopatra's myth in early modern Spain as a whole is worth being considered a monographic study itself. So, the trace left by the last sovereign of the Pharaonic Egypt between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries can be seen, for example, on Art and Literature. Regarding Philip II, it is interesting to consider an object belonging to the Royal Apothecary of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. From a preparatory drawing ascribed to one of the Zuccari brothers, Taddeo or Federico (circa 1565), is possible to find the exact scene inside an italian ceramic cooling vessel. This piece of pottery (from Fontana's workshop in Urbino, 1570-1575), which was used to store pharmacy for cooling glasses in water. It may have belonged to the set of dishes which Guidobaldo II, duke of Urbino, sent as a gift to Spanish King. The scene inside illustrates a picture of naval combat that took on during the Alexandrian War (48 BC), although the Egyptian city painted is in accordance to the model of the Renaissance urbs. This object is currently in Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid [inv. num. 457].

<sup>32</sup> Mexía's words refers to «ill-fated Antony, who had all of his life been a diligent and excellent Captain», but unfortunately «abandoning himself over the love» of Cleopatra. Mexía 1547, 29.



campaigns against the Turk in Greece, Hungary and Austria, Charles V left Genoa and arrived to Barcelona in April 1533. The empress Isabel and their progenies Philip and Mary were waiting for him there. The disembarkation of the Emperor was described as a *new Tarsus*:

«...allí se había agolpado tal multitud de gente deseosa de contemplarte, cual no creo acudiera para ver a Cleopatra, la reina de Egipto, cuando, como una Venus, al ir al encuentro de Marco Antonio en Sicilia, se hizo transportar en una nave dorada, de purpúreas velas y remos de plata, a través del río.»<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that it happens in Sicily instead of Tarsus, and that the journey is across a river instead of a sea, the rendezvous between the Egyptian Pharaoh and the Roman triumvir, not only became a model for Calvete, but also for countless expressions, mainly pictorial, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century that recreated the mythical rendezvous. Nonetheless, when precisely sticking to Philip II's reign, the model of this outdated Egypt is related to the Battle of Lepanto (1571), and enables to connect with Philip's Castilian epic poetry from the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This leads us to the *trace* that results of Egypt in the last days of the Lagid dynasty, mixed with *Eneida*'s Classical Virgilian model. It provided a symbolic-literary recourse that consisted in seeing the victory of Lepanto as the *new Actium*. This figure of speech was used by poets such as Juan Latino (*Austriadis Carmen*, Granada 1573), Jerónimo Corte Real (*Feliciísima victoria concedida a don Juan de Austria en Lepanto*, Lisbon 1578), Alonso de Ercilla (in the second part of *La Araucana*, Saragossa 1578), or Juan Rufo (*Austriada*, Madrid 1584). We are, once again, facing a perception of a corrupted and abominable Egypt. Aside from the analogous viewpoint brought about by the *Old Testament*, the maximum expression of this Egypt was the Greek domination of the land of the Nile under

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<sup>33</sup> «...the place was crowded by a multitude of people who wished to contemplate you, since I don't think they came to see Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, for when she went, as a Venus, to meet Mark Antony in Sicily, she ordered to sail across the river in a golden barge, full of purplish candles and silver made paddles». López de Toro 1958, 113.



the Ptolemy period (305-30 BC), being Cleopatra VII the last pharaoh who ended a historical degradation process that could only be repaired with the victory of Augustus in the Battle of Actium (31 BC). Augustus' «image makers», this is, the Latin authors responsible for shaping strong imperial image in the Augustan age (Virgil, Cicero, Cassius Dio, Ovid, Horace, Propertius, Lucan), contributed to this perception. Paradoxically, the foundations of this image do not seem to exclude the «Pharaoh-Caesar» dichotomy –as the French Egyptologist Jean Yoyotte suggested two decades ago– since the Roman emperor held the title of Pharaoh of Egypt until the division of the Empire in the year 395.

Besides the hieroglyphical, genealogical and mythographic discourse of Egyptian influences, there is a last – and entirely different – manifestation of the Egyptian myth's reception that must be included among these: the one related to medicine, pharmacopoeia and magic remedies. In this sense, the presence of 'oriental balsam' (a kind of resin) in some glass receptacles included in the *Inventario Real de los Bienes que se hallaron en el guardajoyas del Rey Don Felipe Segundo*<sup>34</sup>. One of its components was *Mumia vera aegyptiaca*. Its healing effects were praised by doctors from the circle of the Rey Prudente such as Luis Mercado, who extolled the beneficial effects of the «ungüento egypciaco» ("Egyptian ointment") within their studie on plague; or Andrés de Laguna, author of the Castilian version of Dioscorides' medicine treatise, which was still influential throughout the course of the Renaissance. In agreement with the importance that mummy dust had in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (some of it caused by Paracelsus' influence on him), the emotion that Andrés de Laguna reveals when narrating in the first person that a colleague of his, who was «cirujano muy docto y exercitado, me embio los dias passados de Napoles una caxica llena d'exquisitissima mumia» is not surprising...<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> That is «Royal Inventory of the personal Properties that were found in Philip II's jewel box». Sánchez Cantón 1956-1959, vol. II, 3.

<sup>35</sup> It refers to «an experienced and excellent surgeon, sent to me a box full of extraordinarily exquisite *mumia* all the way from Naples, on the last days». Laguna 1555, R-8514, Lib. I, 60.

With this exact quote about a small box full of exquisite *mummia* arrived from Naples –undoubtedly exciting because it invites us to think where it went– and having succinctly trailed the *trace of Osiris* along these pages, we hope to have introduced the reader to a really fascinating subject and pointed out to which extent was the Spanish Monarchy of Philip II fed – in more than one occasion and through very heterogeneous sources – by the remote waters of the river Nile.

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## **Res Antiquitatis. Journal of Ancient History**

Volume 3 / 2012

Published by  
Centro de História de Além-Mar  
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas  
Universidade Nova de Lisboa / Universidade dos Açores

O Centro de História de Além-Mar da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa e da Universidade dos Açores é financiado pela Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

ISSN 1647-5852

Copies: 250

Printed in Portugal by  
PUBLITO – Estúdio de Artes Gráficas, Lda.  
Parque Industrial de Pitancinhos  
BRAGA – Portugal



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